6:Stone E-5 (1956-1959)1962
SA19 Talamanca SA19
[P. 102(A)]

APPENDIX III: ANTONIO SALDAÑA, LAST KING OF TALAMANCA

by Carlos Meléndez Ch.

CONSTITUTIONALLY, Costa Rica rejected the monarchical form of government in the third decade of the 19th century. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the present era, there was still a reigning king in this country. His name was Antonio Saldaña, a picturesque and proud individual who ruled over the Talamancan Indians.

It is most probable that the title of King among the Talamancans was borrowed from the Zambo-Mosquitos who, under English guidance, had established a "monarchy" on the Mosquito shore which was aimed at protecting the British claim within this area.

At the beginning of the 19th century and without any relationship to the political happenings in Costa Rica, the tribes of Talamanca began to war with one another, the Bribri winning.

There were three chieftains or kings of importance in Talamanca in 1862. These were Chirimo, Santiago Mayas, and Lapis. The most powerful one was Chirimo.[1] In July, 1867, the National Congress passed a law signed by the President of the Republic making the Talamancan chiefs "jefe políticos." This was a silent recognition of the position maintained by the kings in the community. The same law gave these individuals the right to govern and administer justice according to their customs, but under a Director of the Settlements. For this purpose, the government appointed Mr. John H. Lyon, a North American native of Baltimore, who had lived for many years in the region and was well known and respected by the Indians.

At the death of Chirimo, Santiago became the principal king. He visited San José, the

[1] Fernández Guardia, 1918, p. 147; Pérez Zeledón, 1913, pp. 148-49.